

Ivan Iwannado



Ivan Iwannado knows what he wants to do, but like most of us he'll take a while to figure out how to do it. Learn from his mistakes

THIS MONTH:

IVAN SHOPS ONLINE

Ivan Iwannado can't believe it's so close to Christmas and, what's worse, the shops already look horribly crowded. He can't cope with the thought of tramping around the high street, getting kicked by children and pushed by pensioners. Spending money and trying to decide what to buy people is stressful enough without having to enter what looks like a rugby scrum.

Every year, Ivan promises himself that he'll get organised in enough time to do his shopping online. This year he is determined. But will it work, or will Ivan end up at the end of a 50-person-long queue on Christmas Eve because his presents haven't arrived?

As long as Ivan gets organised early enough, shopping online works well. It certainly gets round the problem of crowds, and going to half a dozen online shops is much less tiring than tramping up and down the high street. Really, it's so simple that Ivan can just get on with it.

You might think so, but Ivan's got a couple of questions he'd like to ask first. For a start, is it safe? He's heard all sorts of horror stories about people entering their credit card details online, only for them to be stolen and used without their knowledge.

These things do happen. Ivan's probably also heard of people having their wallets or purses stolen when they're out shopping. There are some unscrupulous people out there and you have to be careful, wherever you are. If Ivan uses a credit card rather than a bank debit card, he's pretty well protected and can be certain he'll get his money back if things go wrong. Credit card companies offer 100 per cent protection from credit card fraud.

Some major credit card companies now offer an extra level of online security with a system known as Verified by Visa and MasterCard SecureCode. You can set up your card so that when you use it online you are asked for a password, and only if you provide the password will the purchase be accepted.

How can Ivan be sure his details are secure when he enters them on a website?



If the site has a padlock symbol in the bottom bar and its address starts with https://, rather than the standard http:// prefix, the site is encrypted, which means the information sent can't be read by anyone other than Ivan and the website to which he is connected. It's not necessary for the entire website to be encrypted – only the payment pages need to be secure.

Ivan's still worried. His card has a high credit limit, and if something were to go wrong and it was misused, the bill could be terrifying.

Yes, but as we said before, it's the credit card company that would lose out. If Ivan's still paranoid, he could get a credit card specifically for use on the internet and request a very low credit limit. That way, he'd know there was no way, under any imaginable circumstances, that the card could be used to run up a huge bill. But Ivan's worrying too much. Credit card purchases are well protected, and buying online is generally seen as being as safe as using a credit card in a restaurant or shop.

What about PayPal? Some people have told Ivan that it's a way to avoid giving out his card number over the internet.

It is, although its most common use is for buying from private individuals or small merchants who don't have the ability to accept credit cards.

What else should Ivan think about when shopping online?

Mostly, it's common sense. For a start, Ivan should make sure his PC is free from viruses and has no spyware running on it. Security begins at home.

Ivan should also make sure he has the full address of the company that runs the website he's dealing with, as well as a phone number. Good companies will have a privacy statement saying what they'll do with your personal information.

A final point to check is whether the company is part of an independent approval scheme, such as TrustUK, Internet Shopping Is Safe (ISIS) or BT Trust Services. Not all companies, including some good ones, have signed up to such schemes so Ivan shouldn't necessarily rule out a particular firm just because it's not a member of a scheme. However, these and other schemes are designed to provide more security when you shop online. Companies that have signed up to TrustUK, for example, promise to protect your privacy, make sure payments are secure, tell you how to cancel orders and deliver your goods within a particular timescale, as well as sorting out complaints.

Speaking of timescales, will Ivan's presents arrive in time for Christmas?

That's a good question, and one that can be answered only by looking at what each website promises. In the early days of online trading there were horrendous problems, but the situation is much better these days. Most large online retailers are good at meeting their delivery promises, although they rely on couriers and the postal service. As long as Ivan leaves himself a reasonable amount of time, he should find that his presents arrive without problems.

Ivan is a happy man. He's ordered lots of nice presents and has that smug feeling afforded by being ahead of the crowd. Now, where's that pile of Christmas cards? 

Nigel Knowitall

If you want to get something done using software but are unsure how to do it, fear not — help is at hand from our resident expert, **Nigel Knowitall**



LINKING TROUBLESOME VIDEO FILES

Q My neighbour was married in Romania, and his wedding video was put on to CDs while he was there. I want to join the film segments together and put them on a DVD. I can play the files using both PowerDVD and Nero Showtime, but neither Nero or Roxio will recognise the files to enable me to change them. When I open the relevant folder I see files with names such as CDI, MPEGAV, VCD, EXT and SEGMENT. Most of these seem to be empty, but some have DAT files inside that I can't do anything with. Can you suggest a program that will work with these files?

John Swallow

A From your description of the folders on your CD, it sounds as if they are Video CD or VCD files. A VCD is a CD that contains moving images and sound. VCDs use the MPEG compression standard to store video and audio, and you have several segments, each of which is stored as a separate VCD file.

There are a few possible ways of converting the segments into a single file. You could start by

downloading a utility called MPEG Scissors from www.rocketdownload.com/details/Misc/5125.htm. This freeware utility can divide MPEG segments into smaller pieces and join them together. Simply load the files you want to join to form a queue, preview them to see how the final clip will look and choose a name for the combined clip. MPEG Scissors isn't perfect, but it's free and you have nothing to lose by trying it.

Another program, Quick AVI MPEG Joiner (www.goldzsoft.com), is available as a free trial and can also combine several AVI video files and MPEG video files into a single AVI or MPEG video file. It supports a wide variety of formats for AVIs and MPEGs, including MPEG1, MPEG2, VCD, SVCD and DVD formats.

FEEDBACK: OUTLOOK EMAIL

Q In the September issue of *Computer Shopper* you answered a reader's question about corrupted emails preventing Outlook downloading all messages ('Over the wild Blueyonder', *Nigel Knowitall*). I had the same problem, and a very nice chap at Tiscali told me about a utility called JBMAIL. You can download this for free at www.pc-tools.net,

and it enables you to see the blank emails and delete them. You can then download your real emails without any further problems in Outlook. I hope this helps.

Joe Unwin

FEEDBACK: EXCEL HIDE AND SEEK

Q I was just reading the letter 'Hiding Activities in Excel' in *Nigel Knowitall*, *Shopper* October 2005 about how to stop the machinations of macros appearing onscreen. I use the ScreenUpdating property:

```
Sub myhiddenmacro()  
With ThisWorkbook.Worksheets(1)  
    Application.ScreenUpdating = False  
    .Cells(i, 1) = "Hello Shopper"  
    Application.ScreenUpdating = True  
End With  
End Sub
```

If I know the update will take some time, I make a text box visible that says something like 'Update in Progress' to show the user that something is happening.

Mark Harding

GOING ROUND IN CIRCLES IN POWERPOINT

Q I'm using PowerPoint and I want to make a circle with text around the outside. How can I do this?

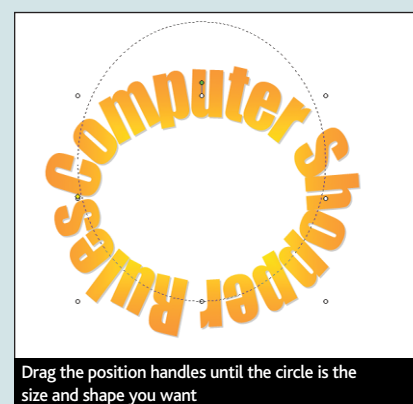
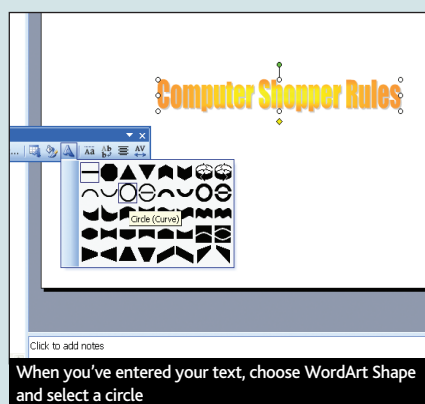
Kevin Bond

A The easiest method is to use WordArt. From the Insert menu, choose Picture then choose WordArt. You'll be offered the basic formats for WordArt. Choose the text appearance you'd like, and don't worry about the

circle just yet. A dialog box will appear into which you can enter the text. Choose a suitable text size for the number of words you want to place round the outside of your circle. Once you've entered the text, click OK and it will appear in your slide. Next, choose WordArt Shape from the toolbox. From the options you're offered, choose the circular layout.

You'll probably find that your circle appears as a squashed ellipse. If so, take the upper or lower of the two white positioning handles and drag the

circle until it's the size and shape you want. The handles are tiny circles around the shape. When you click on them with the mouse, you can pick up the shape to move it or perform some other action. You can also use the yellow adjustment handle to alter the overall shape. If you don't want the text to go quite all the way round the circle, you can use the yellow adjustment handle to change the circle into just part of a circle.





A This is an interesting alternative to the method we suggested. The reader had asked for a way of hiding a worksheet during an updating procedure. The solution we used was to set the worksheet's Visible property to False until the processing was completed. Mark has turned off the screen updating while the information is written into the cells. This has some advantages, but it can mean the user sees old information temporarily until the new data is complete.

However, there are cases where this is more useful than making the sheet invisible. The original question involved switching to a new sheet and carrying out the updates. If a user were working on a single sheet, hiding that sheet while changes were made would be more unsettling than simply hiding the activity in some cells.

SORTING A MODEL LIST

Q I've got a spreadsheet that I use to keep track of my collection of toy models. These are organised into several boxes, which in my innocence I labelled D for Dinky, C for Corgi and so on. I then labelled the toys numerically: 1, 2, 3, 4 and so on. This gives me a code, such as D1, B3 or whatever, that identifies each toy. So far, so good – I have a nice list with items such as:

D1 Dinky 514 Weetabix van
D2 Dinky 923 Bedford van
M41 Matchbox 41 D-type Jaguar

This is fine, but if I want to sort the list into order based on the box ID, it doesn't sort into numerical order. What I want is this:

D1
D2
...
D9
D10
D11
...

But what I get is this:

D1
D10
...
D12
D13
D2

I understand that this happens because I'm sorting a column that's a mix of alphabetic and numeric data, but my software was able to sort this into the correct order originally. It even generated the codes automatically in the 'correct' order. So why can't I resort it into that original order?

Peter Wheeler

A You're right in your assessment of why you can't sort the list into the original order. The only way you could do that would be to revise your box codes to make them all the same length like this: D001, D002, D010 and so on. If you don't want to do that, you can use a separate column to sort your data into order.

For example, if the code for your model ID is stored in column B, you'd create a formula such as:

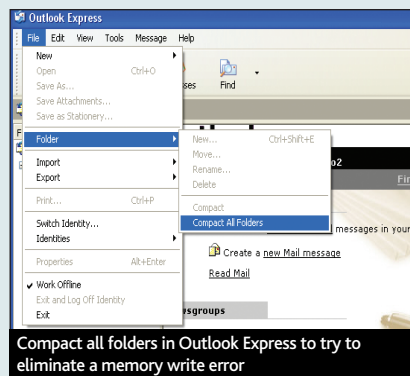
CONFUSING OUTLOOK EXPRESS MESSAGE

Q Every time I switch off Outlook Express, I get this message: "The instruction at 0x77f83aef referenced memory at 0x009a4e7c. The memory could not be written." I do not understand this, much less know what to do about it. Please can you help?

Joe Pester

A This problem can occur for a number of reasons, so you will have to try various possible solutions. The first thing to try is to compact your folders within Outlook Express, because the error could be caused by a problem with the way the information is organised within the folders, or your folders.dbx file could be corrupted in some way. Compacting them rearranges the information and often alleviates the problem. Start by using the File menu, choose Folder and then Compact All.

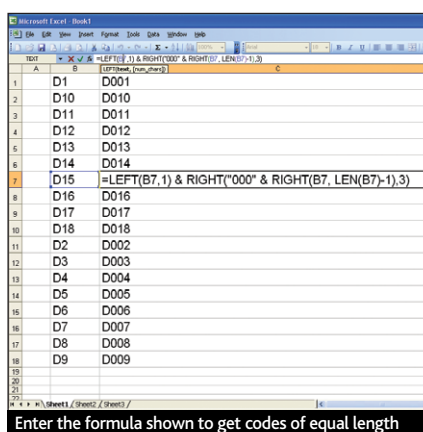
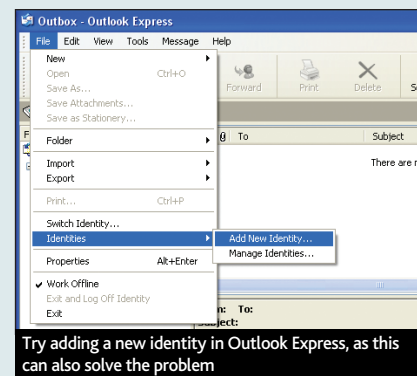
Some users have reported that the problem occurs because they had set up automatic message compacting and their system had



crashed during the compaction process. If you think this might be the case with your copy of Outlook Express, you can switch off automatic compacting of messages by going to Tools, Options, Maintenance and turning off Compact Messages in the Background.

Another way to get around the problem is to create a new identity for yourself. From the File menu, choose Identities then Add New Identity. Try using the new identity and see if the error occurs when you close Outlook Express. If it doesn't, you can import the address book and folders from the old identity into the new one and delete the old identity.

If none of these suggestions works, have a look at the other software you're running at the same time as Outlook Express. Anti-virus software can cause this error, so test this by trying to close Outlook Express with your anti-virus software's email scanning option turned off. If this proves to be the cause of your problem, you can't turn off the anti-virus software permanently, but you can report the error and find out if there are any updates to help.



=LEFT(B1,1) & RIGHT("000" & RIGHT(B1, LEN(B1)-1),3)

First, this formula gets the leading character using LEFT(B1,1). The LEN part finds out how long the rest of the ID is. This length, with 1 subtracted to take account of the initial alphabetic character, is used to obtain the rest of the ID. This is carried out

by the part of the formula that reads RIGHT(B1,LEN(B1)-1).

To make this the correct length, the text string 000 is joined to the part obtained above. Then RIGHT is used again to get the right-most three characters of the string, which before read 00012, for example. If you have more than 999 models in any of the boxes, you may prefer to increase the 000 to 0000 and the 3 to 4.

You can use this method if you want to make your model IDs a standard length. Create the formula for the second method, and once the numbers have appeared select the values and copy them to the clipboard. Use the Paste Special option on the Edit menu and choose Values. This will copy the updated codes over the original codes. **CS**

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